

Relationship formation: the culture of attachment

Heidi Keller

University of Osnabrück, Germany

Abstract

Relationship formation is a universal developmental task for which humans are equipped with universal predispositions. The claim of attachment theory, that the emergence, the nature and the consequences of attachment are equally universal has been challenged by cultural and cross cultural research. In this presentation, the prevailing attachment conception is discussed as an adaptation to Western middle class psychology, where psychological autonomy is the motor of development. An alternative is presented with the case of the rural Cameroonian Nso who have a physical conception of attachment, i.e. reliability of physical care and body contact, integrated in a multiple caregiving system. The necessity to recognize culture specific solutions of universal developmental tasks is discussed.

Short bio

Heidi Keller holds a chair for developmental psychology at the University of Osnabrück in Germany and is head of the Culture and Development Unit there. She also holds a position at NIH Section of Social and Emotional Development in Bethesda and is a fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in Berkeley, USA. Currently, Dr. Keller is president of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology. Her longstanding research interests and publications have focused on cross-cultural similarities and differences in childrearing in societies such as Costa Rica, Cameroon, India und the United States.